

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------|--|
| . | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Ashley Libby

Abstract:

Chapter one of Rick Wormeli's *Fair Isn't Always Equal* discusses what exactly differentiated instruction means to the students, parents and teachers. It helps the read get into the "mind-set" of using differentiated instruction in the classroom. "[Differentiated instruction](#) is doing what's fair for students." (3) There are many ways to use differentiated instruction in class. Some are as simple as allowing the students to use a TI-83 calculator when the lessons involves advance and abstract concepts. This allows the class to keeps its momentum instead of the students getting stuck on the calculations and errors. However, differentiated instruction does not mean that the teachers make the learning easier. "It provides the appropriate challenge that enables students to thrive." (4) Some parents and community members don't fully understand the concept of differentiated instruction and think that it provides a crutch to the students. They think that the teachers are babying the students. The books provides a great example of comparing two students where one receives differentiated instruction and the other does not but the assessment is still fair. There are two students that sit in the back of the classroom and one wears thick glasses because he is nearsighted. The teacher asks both students to read the text that is written on the board which is written in small letters. To make things equal, the teacher removes the nearsighted student's glasses and still requires him to read the text. The student is unable to read the board despite many efforts. Many people would think that this makes it harder for the student but it actually makes it easier. Without the glasses the student has an excuse to not do the assignment. When given the glasses, the student is compelled to read the board and understand what it says. He actually thrives instead.

Synthesis:

Ashley Godbout worded the purpose of differentiated instruction in a way that's easily understood, "

Differentiated classes are challenging because they keep students engaged and hold students accountable for their learning.” As a class we all agreed that differentiated instruction is not making the students learning easier but instead it actually enhances their learning. The class agreed that using differentiated instruction does not “baby” the student. Russell Warren clearly explained some of the benefits for using this type of instruction in the classroom. “School shouldn’t be a place where students have to abide by their teacher’s rigid instructions, or learn how to take a standardized test because that’s the only way they’ll really be graded, or expect the world to be so regimented.” Students can breathe easier by knowing that they are [learning](#) as a direct result from their decisions.

Michael Diffin

The first chapter in *Fair Isn’t Always Equal* is about the idea of using differentiated instruction in the classroom to provide a fair environment for all students to not only learn equally but to learn at the pace and level that they need and to learn the different ways that they need to learn. There are many things that can be done in the classroom that can change how the students learn and pick up the different information. We, as educators, need to do what’s best for the students and what’s best for the students is being fair. We have to correlate what is being taught with what they need to learn with how they need to learn it at whatever pace that may be. The students need to be differentiated for every time that they need it. This, however, is almost impossible without working with them directly. The idea of being not only fair but developmentally appropriate is an important one.

Cheyenne

The first chapter of Rick Wormeli’s book *Fair Isn’t Always Equal* is all about differentiated instruction. He tells us that, even though we may not have picked up on it right away, and it may not have been called the same thing, teachers have been using differentiated instruction for a very long time. This has been a recurring theme for us, so it is obviously very important, which is understandable. If it weren’t for differentiated instruction, we would have an extremely high rate of “unruly” students, students who are considered “unteachable”, which we know is not true, and most likely a very high dropout rate. In order to teach all students, it is important that educators make fair learning environments where the needs of all students can be met. Differentiation is the floor plan, the foundation, if you will, of this concept. It holds up the walls that are our students. It allows us to create a fair learning environment that is beneficial to all students. I think it is safe to say that differentiation is unavoidable; it makes learning, as well as teaching, easier. Although it is okay to have a struggle every once in a while, having it be a constant struggle to learn and/or teach is extremely frustrating and can seem like the brakes have been put on and now you are going in reverse. It is important to cater to all students’ needs and realize that easy to one student is not easy to another student, and the same goes for what people find difficult.

Ashley Godbout

In chapter 1 of *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, the author defines differentiated instruction and includes how it must be fair to all students and should maximize students' learning. The author, Rick Wormeli, suggests some people might think differentiated instruction makes learning easier for students and that they might become too dependent on people differentiating for them in the real world. Rather, differentiating makes them competent and able to understand themselves as learners. This allows them to advocate for themselves and their own learning. They find out what works for them and what doesn't and they can use this to maximize their learning. The author explains a situation where a teacher took away a near-sighted child's glasses and asked him to read the writing on the board at the front of the room and learn from it. He was squinting and couldn't read it but the child next to him without the glasses could read the board perfectly. Some might say the teacher made it harder for the near-sighted child but the author suggests she made it easier because removing his glasses gave the student an excuse, an escape from the assignment. With his glasses he's urged to read the board and reflect on the content, therefore making the class more demanding, not easier. The "my approach or nothing" or "one-size-fits-all" classrooms don't work because they make it too easy for students to coast through or drop out. Differentiated classes are challenging because they keep students engaged and hold students accountable for their learning. The author goes on to explain how differentiation happens in real world careers and isn't just applied to classrooms. This concept is important to our students and classrooms because we're tailoring to each student's learning needs so they can all be successful. What works for one person might not work for the one sitting next to them, but they all have potential to be successful learning the same information, just in different ways.

Tyler Michaud

The first chapter of *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, by Rick Wormeli, focused on the importance of differentiated instruction. In the classroom, it is critical that the students are being provided with choices in their instruction; for this to be most effective the teacher must realize that learning styles vary. By successfully implementing options in the classroom it should help level the playing field for all students to achieve success. Another key component is knowing, as the teacher, how to balance the responsibilities between yourself and the students. For example, a teacher that condemns the students for failing is going to miss out on an opportunity for professional growth, sometimes self-reflection and the ability to admit fault can result in the discovery of a new approach that may help the students. It seems that when people hear the term "differentiated instruction" they jump to "special treatment", this is not the case, rather it allows each and every student the chance to learn in the way that is understandable to them. In high school, my teacher had us study the "No Fear Shakespeare" version of "Hamlet", which was a graphic novel; although the works' medium changed the story was still taught to us, making simple changes like this can be useful. After being in the school for only three weeks I have begun to uncover many of the different styles of learning that exist in my classes. As a teacher, I will use this knowledge to create lessons that will provide even the most reluctant or struggling students the opportunity to do well.

Matt Potter

Alike the other books we have been reading FIAE begins in a very similar way. Differentiation seems to be a huge concentration in today's educational world. I notice however, that the authors are different in their approach in this book. They force us to think about our own personal experiences as well as back to when we were in school. This is very rewarding, due to our ability to create our own perspectives, where as the other book tell us what and how we as teachers should do things. In my experiences I have had amazing teachers who were very good with differentiation with in the classroom. I have experienced teachers who lack differentiation, and in retrospect those classes we less enjoyable, and harder to succeed in. This fact inspires me to master my approaches of teaching, so that all my students have a fair and equal chance to learn.

Teaching isn't about what you teach your students. FIAE make a great point when they say, "What we teach is irrelevant. Its what our students learn after their time us that matters." This couldn't make more sense, non-differentiated teachers teach just as much as differentiated teachers, but there is a huge gap in what the students actually learn, and remember. As teachers our duty is to develop a setting that creates a fair and equal learning environment that is suitable to all student needs. One underlying question comes into play however; how do we incorporate the research of differentiation into our classrooms, and content areas? I think this can be done much easier today than past years, simply because we have so many more tools, and information. Through readings, experimenting, and a passion for success, I believe teachers can incorporate many things. Differentiation is an ongoing thing and it's becoming hard to avoid; this is a very good thing. Differentiation is a great tool that makes learning and teaching easier.

As a teacher I will constantly evaluate my students, and differentiate my teaching in as many ways needed. With the endless technology today it will not be hard to find resources. This will help me to adapt my classroom all the time, based on the needs of my students. One thing I will always keep in mind is that differentiation isn't limited to instruction; it is also assessment.

Christopher Vogel

The major purpose of this book is to focus on being fair to everyone. If we might every student equally, some would do better and some worse and some average just because of their different learning styles and needs. The teacher is expected to provide each student with a fair chance of completing the required work even if it differs from student to student. I thought it was interesting that the book talked about how many of the sentences that we start with today (concerning scientific knowledge or understanding) is what is currently known now. This book leaves the possibility open that changes will occur to our understanding of how the brain works and that teachers should adapt accordingly. This implies we because in addition to understanding how the brain works, I need to know how to effectively use my resources to help each student learn what they need to complete the class path. The comment that the book makes about differentiated teaching helps the student understand how they learn. This could be an important area to explore in the classroom in getting the students involved and asking how they think they would learn best. The result would be open communication between student and teacher and provide more effective ways of learning and teaching. The discussion of how the real world is as differentiated as the classroom should be in factoring. I hope to imagine that into the classroom by putting it out to students. This way they can see the different strategies and suggest that can put in place to better help their learning.

Cole Phillips

Wormeli stresses throughout the first chapter of *Fair Isn't Always Equal* that differentiated instruction in the classroom exists for a reason, and a good one, but cannot, necessarily, be a concept to fall back on all the time if we cannot fully understand it. As such, the author details differentiated instruction heavily and as being a concept which is attentive and careful, but is not excusal or condescending.

We must, as Wormeli suggests, not treat differentiation in the classroom as proverbial 'babying,' or the like. Instead, we must view it as a means of accelerating productivity and allowing students to feel accomplished and as though they are doing their best works and living up to their fullest potentials. Through differentiated instruction in the classroom, we, as instructors, not only instill a feeling of catered,

individualized learning, but leave students accountable for themselves and for their own work ethics as well as end results.

FIAE makes a point to address that students will be in our classrooms, and may or may not listen. They will make their own choices, and they may or may not be interested in any aspect of the content area. What it also suggests, though, is that it is less important that a student walk away a veritable expert on the field, and more important that they walk away inspired.

Russell Warren

In the beginning of Rick Wormeli's book *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, we are presented with various examples of differentiated instruction we may have encountered during our own experiences in middle and high school. There are plenty of examples, from desk arrangement to providing extra time, that illustrated how simple yet effective some of the practices are. It's extremely important to use differentiated instruction, as "we give students the tools to handle whatever comes their way" (p. 5). Especially considering that our generation of teachers has such a bountiful field of scientific study to look at, backing up claims of multiple intelligences, it is important we are aware of these differences. I completely agree with Wormeli's multi-faceted argument here in this first chapter. Students *need* to have classrooms tailored to their needs. School shouldn't be a place where students have to abide by their teacher's rigid instructions, or learn how to take a standardized test because that's the only way they'll really be graded, or expect the world to be so regimented. There are just as many job opportunities and life experiences as there are learner types, and it is our jobs as teachers to not only address these differences, but use effective practices in our classrooms to celebrate and use those differences to the student's advantage, trying our best to ensure understanding and success in the kids. Without these practices, students are bundled into 'gifted' and 'slow learner' groups, isolating them. Ignoring multiple intelligences can cause students to lose interest in school, setting them on a rocky path. Using differentiated instruction not only makes it easier for us, but helps the students in ways we couldn't even imagine.

Meghan Hughes

Differentiated practice is essential to success of individuals in the classroom. It is important for students to understand that his/her needs are important, and that these needs will try to be met by the educators. Differentiated practice can also introduce students to new ideas of learning, and they may even find a new method that works better for them than any other method they may have used in the past. The author defines differentiated instructions as, "doing what's fair for students. It's a collection of best practices strategically employed to maximize students' learning at every turn, including giving them the tools to handle anything that is undifferentiated." This idea plays into the title, *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, very well. What is fair for all students does not necessarily mean that all students will get equal attention or individualized help from the teacher. What is fair is to provide all students with the opportunity to learn, and also to provide them with the appropriate resources they might need to learn what needs to be learned. We also need to recognize when a student is or is not being challenged in the classroom. As educators, it is our job to make sure students are always facing challenging tasks and information, for this will help to foster their ability to learn. Successful educators must foster strong relationships with students in order to understand their individual and specific needs in the classroom. Having these relationships will also help the educator to identify when a student is or is not being challenged, and will help the educator

to come up with something that will challenge all students.

Ashley Libby

This chapter was discussed how important it is to have a positive mind-set about using Differentiated Instruction in the classroom. It showed that there are many different types of differentiated instructions and almost all of us encountered this instruction when we were students from kindergarten to high school. Some may think that using differentiated instruction is giving the students a crutch that they can lean on throughout their school years. They argue that they are not truly learning because they are not learning on their own or without help. That is completely false, because using differentiated instruction actually helps make the classroom fairer for every student. This way, there is not a student that is more advantaged than another just because they learn differently. A way for students to be able to appreciate their success is to make them learn without the support so that they can struggle and realize how much better they do with the added help. Having differentiated instruction affects students further than just your specific classroom. Differentiated instruction helps students all the way past school and to graduation. It helps the students understand how they learn and they can understand what works better for them specifically. With this knowledge, they can go on through life with a better advantage. This type of instruction helps them focus and helps them breathe easier knowing they are getting the help they need in order to obtain their full potential in school. As a teacher I need to be able to incorporate differentiated instruction in my classroom. This way my students will receive the help that they need in order to succeed in my classroom. If they know how they learn, than they will be able to carry that knowledge with them for future classes.

Tyler Brown

As the chapter states, “differentiated instruction does not mean we make learning easier for students.” This seems to cover a general oversight about differentiated instruction that many people tend to align themselves with. I’ve witnessed this oversight in today’s educational system quite recently. While MBHS does make the effort of grouping students into classes based upon their proficiency levels in order to make differentiating for teacher’s easier and more organized, it unfortunately fosters some unhealthy practices that include “dumbing down” the curriculum for these “lower-level” students. This is the pitfall that the first chapter seeks to explain and help us avoid. Differentiating instruction is designed to avoid teaching to the “bell-curve” that only allows for continual improvement for students in the classroom that are represented closest to the median of proficiencies. Instead, educators who differentiate appropriately are able to teach on a “J-curve” which fosters continual improvement for all students in the classroom which can only lead to more positive attitudes and expectations surrounding the learning environment. In combination with the use of effective differentiated instruction, the chapter reveals that an educator must also achieve a balance of accountability between themselves and their student’s performances. In this practice we can relate to Goldilocks, who would know that the key is to fall somewhere in the middle where both the student’s and the teacher benefit from an equal distribution of accountability. This way, the students are able to reflect on their mistakes and acquire knowledge and self-identity through being the center of their own learning, and teachers are still responsible for consistent application of differentiated instruction that allows each individual student continual growth.

Devin Boilard

Rick Wormeli uses Chapter One of his book “Fair Isn’t Always Equal” to really expel any doubt a reader might have about the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in the classroom and its rise in the field of education. Wormeli's biggest rival is the claim that DI gives too much power to the student, allowing them to dictate the complete direction of the learning and the amount of effort exerted. Wormeli does well to rebuttal these claims by citing an example in which glasses are used as a tool indicative of DI. The story compares the learning of two boys sitting in the back of a classroom tasked with copying information from the board and assessing it, one boy impaired with near-sightedness uses glasses to bring the board into focus, the other does not. Wormeli uses this example to showcase how the resource of the glasses is not altering the assignment or making the task easier but rather possible; it levels the playing field between the two boys. Another strong move on Wormeli’s part is his connecting of DI to the “real world.” As teachers our end goal is to prepare students for their adult life and make sure they are equipped with the abilities to strive. Teaching methods in which students learn how to be more self aware of how they process information is beneficial both short term and long term.

I do not think that I am exactly the intended audience for this chapter as I am already very much on board with the practice of DI. I do however think that in this early state of my pedagogical learning experience that it is important for me to still read supports of the practice. I should not assume the methods being presented to me are the best, I should know they are and why they rank superior. I think the biggest recognition I walk away with from this chapter is how small scale DI can be; while it can appear in large-scale productions such as IEPs it can also be as simple as the rewording of a sentence.
